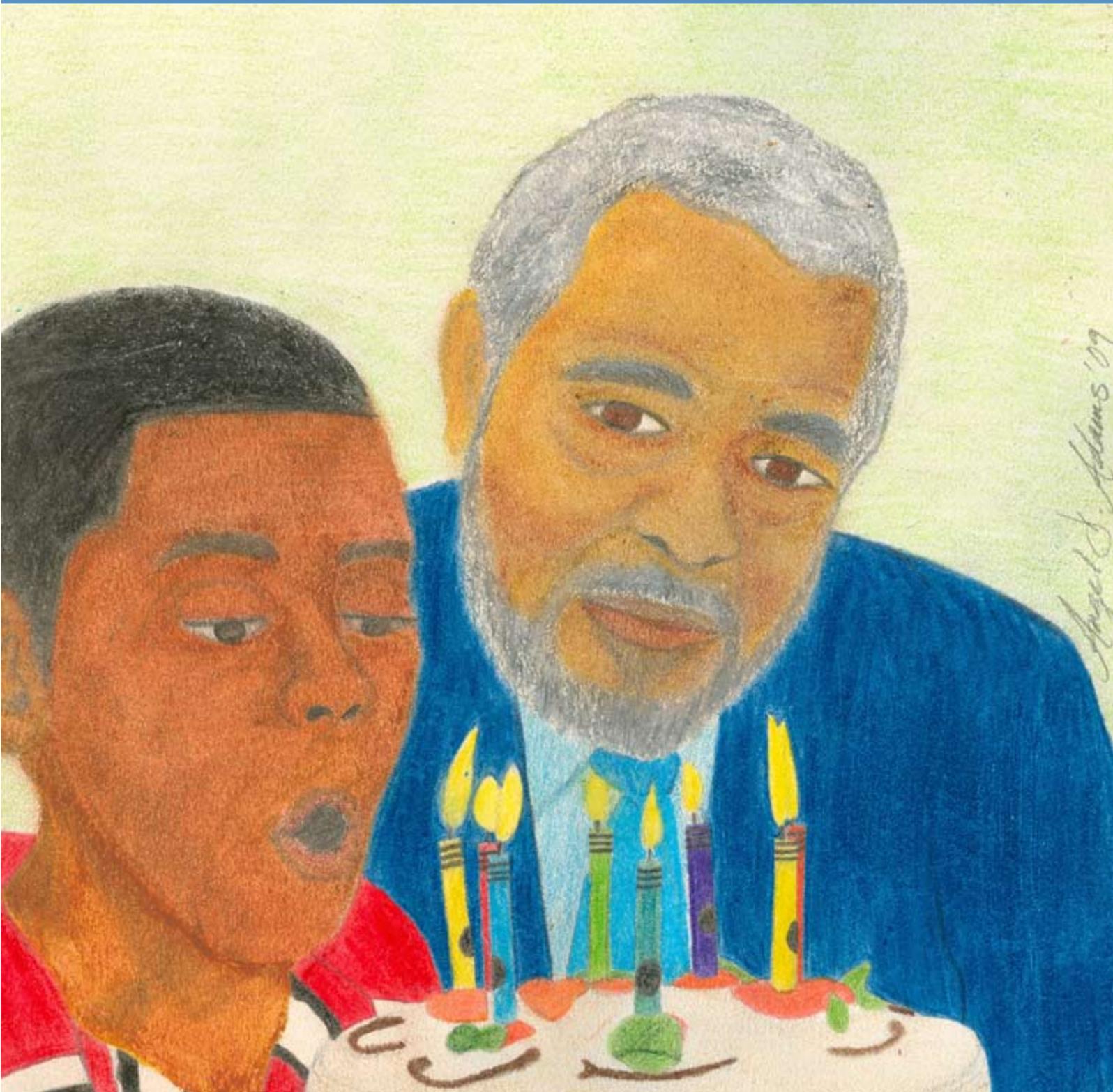


THE Connection

News and Information from the National Court Appointed Special Advocate Association



Cover
Story:

Permanency—More
Than Just Homes
page 8

Features:

National Conference
Coverage
page 15

New Program Serves
Older Youth
page 13

volunteer voice

Renate G. Justin, MD

CASA Volunteer
CASA Inc. of Larimer County
Ft. Collins, CO

Why CASA volunteer advocacy? What motivates us to volunteer for CASA programs, to work with abused and neglected children? For me it is related to an experience in my childhood that kindled my passion to help children who suffer due to war, poverty, persecution and other evil.

As an 11-year-old, I slept with my friends in the hayloft above the cows whose munching penetrated our dreams. The summer camp near the ocean in Holland in 1938 was evidence of my mother's remarkable energy and persistence. She had found a sympathetic farmer who agreed to let her use his barn for 30 refugee children from the Quaker boarding school called Eerde. The students attending Eerde had fled from Nazi persecution and had no place to go for the long vacation. My mother, who herself had recently escaped from Hitler's Germany, took all of us under her wing. Days at the beach, long hikes, sitting in a circle and singing at night helped us to gather the courage to face the sunrise. We were sad and lost, with parents either dead or in concentration camp. We held each other if one of us cried during the night. Rarely did we shed tears in daylight. Meals were prepared on the large woodstove of our hosts and eaten outdoors on well worn picnic tables. At the end of the summer we thanked the stout farmer and his rosy-cheeked wife, bade them goodbye and returned to our boarding school.

My urgent need to help children in trouble was born that summer on the farm in Holland, living with peers whose mothers and fathers had been tortured and killed, whose families had been destroyed. I was too young to enunciate it then, but ever since I have wanted to help children heal from the severe trauma of loss. Once that desire had

taken root, I met children throughout my life who needed help from an interested adult.

My family embarked in 1939 on the last boat to leave Holland before the Germans invaded. It was a cargo boat with limited facilities, overcrowded with European refugees, old and young. There were people sleeping in the hallways and on the floor of the deck. Children cried all night, seasick and miserable. My oldest sister organized a morning kindergarten for the little ones and appointed me her first assistant. We sang and played *Ring Around the Rosie* and *Backe backe Kuchen* (patty cake), universal games that cross the language barrier. Anxious, hungry parents, desperate with homesickness, brought their children every morning of the long and dangerous crossing to play with us. The little ones mirrored the adults around them. The heavy atmosphere on board—the preoccupation of their parents with the mines in the English Channel—made the children cranky and irritable, but a few hours of carefree play helped them regain their equilibrium.

Years later, when I was in college and the long and terrible war in Europe had ended, I worked with orphan refugee children. They had been allowed to come to the United States at President Truman's invitation because they were languishing in the displaced person camps in Germany. I lived in a reception center with kids ranging from 2 to 18 years and speaking different languages—Lithuanian, Polish and Yiddish. My job was to teach English, take the youngsters on field trips and introduce them to foods they had never tasted. They had scrounged for garbage, for potatoes left in the fields, for so long that it was hard for them to sit down to a meal.

My international students were eager to learn English, to go to school, to become part of



[continued on page 4]

Concurrent Planning in Permanency Decisions: Reunion, Adoption and Lifelong Relationships

Hon. Ernestine Gray
Orleans Parish Juvenile Court, New Orleans, LA and
President, National CASA



Concurrent planning is a concept unfamiliar to many people outside of child welfare systems and difficult for many in child welfare to actualize. The idea behind concurrent planning is that while whenever possible we are focused on family reunification, we need to have a backup plan. We will not want to start over if reunification does not work out, creating delays to permanency. So we are always working on two parallel tracks. This makes good sense and does not detract from reunification efforts. It simply says that if reunification does not work out, we are going to move toward termination of parental rights and adoption. Or we are going to give legal custody to a relative.

Concurrent planning is the “just-in-case” preparation that gets children to permanency much sooner. It is not a one-size-fits-all proposition. Different situations call for different plans.

For example, let’s say I am reviewing a new case involving an infant. What I would usually require is a concurrent plan of reunification/adoption. I would go this route because for a baby or toddler, I would not be inclined to explore one of the less permanent options such as giving legal custody to a relative. Ideally the young child’s initial placement is in a “dually certified” home, where the foster parents are open to adopting. So adoption becomes the backup plan if reunification does not work out.

Concurrent planning for older children is often different. Unfortunately, this population is not adopted as often, making it harder to place them in dually certified homes. As a judge, I am likely to propose kinship care or guardianship as the backup plan for an older child because the child has probably had some contact—and hopefully a significant relationship—with relatives.

Additionally, it is important to work on other key factors necessary to ensure that the older child will become a productive adult. These are paying attention to their education, teaching them independent living skills and creating lifelong connections.

Educational advocacy is an important topic we have covered in past issues and in this issue’s “Program Spotlight” (page 24). At the same time that we ensure school success, we must teach youth independent living skills such as budgeting, setting up a household and accessing health care. This extra attention is needed when children have not had the benefit of growing up in an intact home and a stable school environment.

And what does *permanency* mean for older youth who are not reunified or adopted, whether because of circumstances or the youth’s choice? For some time, those of us in national child welfare circles have talked about the importance of lifelong adult connections for these older youth. Think about it: In order for any of us to make it in life as an adult, we need people who we can call on when we want to celebrate the good times or commiserate in the bad times. Certainly for children who have grown up without the structure of an intact home, making those connections is absolutely critical. They need to know that when they stumble there will be someone there for them. It is also important that they have a person who can advise them and connect them to helpful resources. And when youth are connected in this way to a caring adult, we are not saying that reunification is ruled out. After all, we can never have too many people who love us!

Three years ago, Hurricane Katrina dispersed Louisiana children all over the country. One of the questions that came up soon after the storm was how to develop these adult connections when children have been scattered all over. Our CASA volunteers began to mine the children’s case files for contacts. From each list of names, volunteers looked for appropriate people who were significant to each child when they were growing up. We then contacted these folks to learn whether they were available to be a resource. When they were, we figured out a way to connect the child and the adult to see whether an ongoing relationship was possible.

[continued on page 5]

THE Connection

News and Information from the National Court Appointed Special Advocate Association



A publication of the National CASA Association, representing 1,018 program offices and 68,842 CASA volunteers serving 240,894 children nationwide.

The nationwide Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) movement mobilizes community volunteers to speak up for the best interests of abused and neglected children.

CASA volunteers work for the judge to review and monitor cases of children who become part of the child protection system. CASA volunteers work closely with the child and family to bring an independent assessment of the case to court, recommending to the judge what is best for the child's future.

CASA volunteers help prevent children from becoming "lost" in the child welfare system. They give children a chance to grow up in safe, permanent homes.

Hon. Ernestine Gray *President*
 Renne Bilson *Vice President*
 Michael Piraino *Chief Executive Officer*
 James Clune *Chief Communications Officer*
 Michael Skinner Mendelow *Managing Editor*
 Sharon Heiber *Contributing Editor*
 Brian Lew *Contributing Editor*
 Theresa Carleton *Contributing Writer and Archivist*

The Connection is designed to keep CASA programs, volunteers and the public abreast of the latest news and developments affecting our work with abused and neglected children. Written contributions are welcome. Published quarterly by the National CASA Association.

The Connection is produced and paid for by the National CASA Association.

This project was supported by Cooperative Agreement No. 2008-CH-FX-K001 from the Office of Juvenile Justice & Delinquency Prevention, Office of Justice Programs, US Department of Justice. Points of view or opinions in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the US Department of Justice.

Unless otherwise noted, children in *Connection* photos are not from actual abuse and neglect cases.



Subscriptions: \$45 for one year. Subscriptions to The Connection are included as part of National CASA Association membership.
 © 2009 by the National CASA Association, 100 W. Harrison, North Tower - Suite 500, Seattle, WA 98119-4123.
 Phone (206) 270-0072 or (800) 628-3233 Fax (206) 270-0078
 Email: theconnection@nationalCASA.org
CASAforchildren.org and CASAnet.org
 All rights reserved.

Speak Up for a Child®

Voices & Viewpoints

Volunteer Voiceinside cover

From the President..... 1

Permanency for Older Youth
 Partner Perspective by Kathi Crowe 3

Brick by Brick
 Youth Editorial by Manny 6

Closing Words from Judge Hatchett
 CASA Volunteers Help Ensure Permanency 29

Special Features & Profiles

Permanency: More Than Just Homes 8

2009 National Conference 15

Regular Features

Association News 13

Top Tips for Volunteers
 6 Tips for Working Well with Judges 21

Book Club: *Learning to Live: A Black Woman's Journey*
Beyond Foster Care 22

Child Welfare News 23

Program Spotlight 24

Field Notes 26

Connection Sightings 28

Cover Artist



Artwork for this issue's cover was created by Angel D. Adams. An alumna of foster care, Adams is currently a student at the University of Alaska Anchorage.

Permanency for Older Youth

Kathi M. Crowe, MSW, LICSW
Executive Director
National Foster Care Coalition



All children and youth need a safe, loving family that they can count on forever. This may be made up of one caring person or a large group with several generations of extended family. What is essential is that it is forever, with all of the unconditional love and support that comes with family.

Being a member of a family is, in part, how we define ourselves. One of the first things a child learns as they begin to develop language is their last name, their familial identity. Children are curious to know how they are related to others in the family, to know who their “people” are and to understand their connections. It is part of how they determine their place in the larger world.

For children and youth involved in the foster care system, that familial identification has been disrupted. Children who are not living with at least one of their parents are constantly in situations where they need to explain their living arrangements. They often feel stigmatized in their schools and in their community. Being in a situation where they constantly have to explain their relationship to the people they live with challenges fragile self-esteem. As part of the explanation, children have to justify why they do not live with their parents, which often finds them grappling with an uncomfortable pull between feelings of loyalty toward their birth family and the need to tell some version of the truth, often at great risk of ridicule and judgment.

Permanence for older youth is often described in terms of its

indicators: a place to go for the holidays, someone to call to share good (or not so good) news, someone to call for advice or a favorite recipe, or somewhere to store extra belongings in between semesters or apartments. Although those indicators are important, they do not describe the essence of permanence. Is family less of a family if you do not get together to share a holiday meal? Or if you *do* get together for a holiday only to discover that your family is not as ideal as you remembered them to be? We must be careful not to confuse the indicators of permanence with permanence itself. Having a place to store extra belongings does not mean that a young person has permanence.

As youth in foster care prepare to transition to adulthood, permanence continues to be critically important. Relatives and other important people in the youth’s life should be identified in conjunction with the youth; they should be located and engaged in establishing a solid support system.

The child welfare field has generally focused its permanency efforts on family-finding. Creative methods of accomplishing the important work of locating and engaging relatives and fictive kin (those we consider family who are not actually related) have developed into a near art form. But we miss the mark if we only attend to half of the equation. Children and youth need to be prepared for being a part of a family. They have had their trust violated repeatedly, first by the family they were born into and often later by the system charged

with their care in the form of multiple moves, frequent turnover of social workers and case transfers. The resulting losses need to be adequately grieved to enable the youth to prepare emotionally for new attachments. Many older youth reject the notion of adoption when it is initially presented to them because it represents an enormous emotional risk, and self-preservation prevents them from taking that risk or even allowing themselves to acknowledge that family is something they desire. They also often feel that belonging to a new family would mean they have to reject their family of origin, and that “disloyalty” is unfathomable.

Family is what grounds us throughout our lifetime. The need for family does not end at a particular age—not at 60, not at 40, not at 25 and certainly not at 18. As adults, we supplement family by adding people of our choosing. We collect people throughout our lifetime, not by the dozens, but a few, carefully chosen friendships with people we choose to draw into our life. We often give them official roles; for example they become the godparents to our children. We share vacations or holiday meals or get together with them to vent after “blood” family has left. Together, these real and fictive kin are our “people,” our support systems, the ones who will show up for us and for whom we will show up...always. 🏠

the society in which they happened to land. They struggled with nightmares, with fears that would overcome them at the sight of soldiers, police or anyone in uniform. They had problems with taking a shower, with brushing their teeth and with not eating too much. They had lived through unimaginable deprivation and hardship, and the other staff and I could not dispense enough hugs to even begin to heal their wounds.

I realized then and realize now that such severe trauma rarely resolves; the after-effects of the injury and pain, even if subtle, can last a lifetime. My empathy and friendship for the young refugees was tempered by anger at what these youngsters had been made to suffer. Why? Could anyone expect them to recover and become forgiving adults? Some showed amazing resilience, while others could not adjust and became street children. The younger ones were eventually placed in homes and schools; the older ones tried to find work. Each one of these children would have benefited from a CASA advocate to help surmount the red tape and educational hurdles they faced.

As a family physician, I was involved with many children whose lives were broken due to neglect and abuse. My work with the CASA program began many years ago, and it has helped me to find compassion and to bridle my outrage for the fathers who abused, the mothers who abandoned their children. When I found severe traumatic injuries in my young patients, listening to the perpetrators taught me to control my indignation. The story of the abuser often is that of a difficult childhood which lacked the essential elements of love and security. That helped me understand the roots of the abusive behavior, even though I could in no way condone it. It did make me less judgmental, more open to learn.

Being a CASA volunteer is not an easy job. Trying to forecast whether an addicted mother can stay clean and take care of her infant is far from an exact science. As a volunteer, I find myself torn. I know that children want and need their biological parents, but at times these parents cannot offer a safe home.

Recommending termination of parental rights, though, is a tremendous, awesome responsibility.



Quaker international boarding school, Eerde

I recognize that there are no easy or permanent solutions to child abuse. But there are so many examples of how we can do better by our children. One of my CASA cases involved a 7-1/2-year-old boy with a serious psychiatric illness. There was no treatment facility in our county that would accept someone that young. But we need to provide therapy for our children to keep them from being incarcerated as adults. We can only achieve that goal if we rearrange our

priorities as individuals and as a nation.

It is difficult to know or guess what influence my efforts may have for any individual child whose life touches mine. Having a CASA volunteer does not always effect an immediate benefit in the youngster's situation. What is important is the fact that there

is someone, in the time of crisis, available for support, someone who does not side with mother, father, social worker or foster parents but only with the young person. The children whom I have been privileged to get to know through the CASA program have been generous in welcoming me into their lives, usually at a time of pain and turmoil.

Sometimes I receive an unexpected gift from these children: the homemade Christmas card; the poorly written note, "I luv you"; or the pronouncement, "I want to be a CASA when I grow up." My passion for innocent children does not rely on visible rewards, or it would have burnt out long ago. It is fueled by my conviction that an unexpected response to genuine human involvement of one person with another does at times occur.

This response can influence a child's

life by igniting hope, self-love and self-respect. It is this response that makes working with the CASA program rewarding and fulfills my quest to improve the lives of young people who suffer.

By being a CASA volunteer, I have carried on with my mother's efforts, in the summer camp in Holland, to offer respite and perhaps comfort to children in need. 📣



Renate (in braids) with her family and friend (photo taken in 1937)

More recently, CASA advocate Rebecca Otte of New Orleans has worked with the maternal grandmother of the 16-year-old boy on her caseload in an effort to maintain the permanent relationship between them. As a result of her advocacy, the child is living with his grandmother and attending school regularly. Rebecca is also helping secure summer employment for the child. She states: "Since reunification with his adoptive parent was not an option, I have worked to meet my CASA child's request to remain with a member of his biological family."

I am currently reviewing a book compiled by two people who were in foster care, a book collecting stories from adults who have had some measure of success and who as children spent time in the system. As they revisit their journey through care, almost to a person they talk about the coach, the teacher or the caring neighbor who was there for them. They talk about how important it was to them to have had someone to support them, to encourage them, to tell them that despite everything that had happened to them, they were still valued people. The message that young people can be successful

needs to be consistent and needs to be reinforced for a lifetime. So when the judge, the social worker and the CASA/GAL volunteer are out of the picture, there needs to be somebody who can continue to deliver these positive messages to youth.

Whether a young person ends up returning to the birth parents, being adopted or aging out of care with supportive adults in their corner, permanency is always worth the effort. These are certainly better options than languishing in care or aging out with no support. And CASA volunteers are critical in keeping the wheels of concurrent planning rolling. 🗨️

Wear Your Heart



New! CASA Lapel Pin

Raise awareness by wearing and sharing the new CASA logo pin!
#7033 Silvertone
\$3.00 each or \$2 each for 100+



New! CASA Necklace

With an antiqued silver finish, this stylized heart-shaped pendant features the CASA acronym on both sides and hangs from a 30" black leather cord.
#7039 Silvertone - \$4.99 each

New! CASA Tote Bag

Take your CASA Tote Bag to meetings, the store and beyond. This 12 oz. 100% cotton canvas tote is 12" deep, 15.5" wide and 4.5" thick with an 11.5" handle drop height, making this the ideal everyday carry-all.
#7040 Black - \$7.99 each



To order or see more items, visit ShopCASA.org

Brick by Brick

Before I got adopted, my mom and I had to build a relationship.

By Manny

By the time I got sent to my third foster home when I was 8 years old, I'd started to believe that all my experiences in foster care would be negative. I was trapped in a circle of revolving doors, and I didn't think I'd ever be able to stay in one place.

At my first foster home, there was a kid named Robert who thought he could bully my younger brother Daniel. One day I got so fed up with him that I punched him in the face, and my brother and I got kicked out. Then we were sent to live with my uncle, which was great, until he kicked us out. He said it was because Daniel and I were always fighting.

After getting the boot from my own family, I started to think I couldn't rely on them as much. I figured I could only be independent. I also believed that since I wasn't in those two homes for very long, my next home would be the same.

On my way to my next foster home I thought I'd better be ready to leave in three or four months, and I was already worried about where I'd get sent next. I was also scared of what my new foster mom would be like. I pictured her as a witch with razor-sharp teeth and claws.

No Point in Unpacking

I walked to the door with Daniel and my social worker and rang the bell. I heard barking and I was terrified at what she might have in that house—perhaps a pit bull trained to scare little kids, or torture them as they slept.

The door opened and I saw a woman with a happy face, anxious but full of excitement. She welcomed us in, but I was cautious due to what I'd heard at the door. Then I looked down, and saw a little dog whose bark was way bigger than his bite.

I looked around the apartment and I liked what I saw, but I was still on my toes.

The woman said her name was Melba. She showed us our room and told us to make ourselves at home, but I didn't unpack my things just yet. I felt like there was no point since we would be leaving soon anyway. My brother and I stood in the hall as Melba and my social worker talked in the living room. I started to imagine the horrible things she would do or make us do when my social worker left.

When my social worker came in to say goodbye I thought, "Yup, this is it." I heard the door slam shut and my heart started to pound as I heard footsteps closing in toward the room, but I played it cool and sat on the bed. Her mouth opened and just when I thought she was going to breathe fire, she asked, "Are you guys hungry?"

Giving Me Space

Daniel said yes, but I said no. I was, but I wasn't comfortable asking her for anything. When she went to use the bathroom, I ran to the kitchen and grabbed a little something to eat.



The first few months were all the same. I would get home from school, go to my room, close the door and do my homework. When Melba would come by and ask if I was hungry I'd usually say no. She didn't annoy me or force me to eat. She gave me my space, which was what I wanted. At dinnertime, I would just stay in my room.

Most of the time when I was in my bedroom, Melba would come in and ask if I'd finished doing my homework. I have to admit, it felt good to know she cared. We'd sometimes have little awkward encounters. Maybe a "Hey" or "Hi" but nothing more than that.

After five or six months, I started thinking I might be here longer than I'd thought. I also noticed Melba's consistency when it came to feeding me and checking my homework. Sometimes I'd take some change off her dresser to see how she'd react, but she never seemed frustrated.

Feeling Warmer Inside

I started to feel a little warmer inside. I began to answer, "Yes," when she asked if I was hungry, and I started leaving the door to my bedroom open. We even started to have conversations about things we liked or had in common. I found out that she'd had other foster children living there, but they were given back to their families. I thought that maybe the same thing would happen to me.

I felt happy that under Melba's care those kids had "survived" long enough to be returned to their families. I felt she could do the same for me until I was reunited with my family. This let me feel comfortable trusting Melba. Pretty soon I started to hug her when I came home from school, and I started showing her more affection than any of my previous foster moms.

On my 9th birthday, Melba took Daniel and me to the World Trade Center, which I'd never visited. When we got to a huge building that towered over me, she said, "We're here." I thought that we were going to do something boring, but I was shocked when we got inside. There was actually a huge variety of stores and restaurants. I'd never seen anything like it in my entire life.

Part of the Family

We looked everywhere and we got to eat pizza at a cool restaurant, which I wasn't used to. When we sat down I tried to think of the last time I'd eaten at a table like that. I was so happy that she remembered my birthday, took me somewhere and had gotten me a present.

After that, I opened up a lot more. I believed that Melba had paid her dues and earned her stripes as my foster mom. I started talking to

Melba a lot, and I often found myself the one starting the conversations. We'd talk about the news, school, TV and anything else worth talking about. The conversations weren't three hours long, but they were progress nonetheless. I also began to get closer to her family, which was cool. They didn't live with us, but they all treated me as if I was really part of their family.

Around the time I turned 14, I realized adoption was a possibility. We didn't really talk about it, but as time went on I knew that eventually it had to happen.

"I'm Here for You"

One day Melba sat me on the couch and said, "If you want to be adopted, I am here for you." I had grown to love Melba, but the idea that I couldn't live with my parents again seemed weird to me, and made me sad. I had to think about my situation before I could make a decision.

For years, my birth mother had filled my head with the dream that I'd be going home. But it never happened. Every time she made a promise that I could go home and then didn't keep it, I felt knocked down to the ground. That's when my mother would come again and lift me up, only to knock me down again.

But eventually, I got used to her routine.

Making it Permanent

When I finally realized that going back home wasn't going to happen, I knew that adoption was what I wanted. Now we're in the process of making that happen.

Melba has already been my parent for so long; the only thing that the adoption will change is that my brother and I will legally belong to her. Melba has given me advice and taught me those life lessons that you need to succeed, like saving money, helping people and taking school seriously.

Melba and I have developed a bond over the past several years. I am happy that I finally got a break from the negativity, and soon it will be permanent. Melba has been my salvation from a dramatic and awful life. We started from one brick and built a skyscraper of trust, understanding and love. 🏠

*Manny's last name is withheld by request.
© 2008 Youth Communication. Reprinted from the March/April 2008 issue of Represent magazine with permission. Visit youthcomm.org for more powerful stories from youth who have experienced the child welfare system.*

GET CONNECTED!

The National CASA Association hosts several websites of interest to anyone who values promoting and supporting quality volunteer advocacy to help assure each child a safe, permanent, nurturing home. Visit the following sites to learn more.

CASAforchildren.org

The National CASA website is one of the strongest resources for recruiting new volunteers and supporters for state and local CASA/GAL programs. The website contains volunteer stories along with information on recruitment, public relations activities, news and donating to National CASA.



CASAnet.org

CASAnet is designed to meet the needs of CASA program staff and volunteers, including the advocate's library, program tools, updated information on national initiatives and other material for download.

CASAforchildren.org/JudgesPage

This webpage is dedicated to judges who hear child welfare cases. Content is valuable to other child advocates as well.

ShopCASA.org

A broad assortment of support materials and CASA/GAL promotional items is available through the ShopCASA site.



Permanency: More Than Just Homes

Martin Westerman



Yvonne sits at a cafe table outside the West Seattle PCC Natural Foods Market, wrapped in her red plaid blanket and selling *Real Change*, Seattle’s homeless community newspaper. She has been a friendly fixture there for nearly four years, smiling at shoppers through her black-rimmed glasses and accepting their support, including her blanket and gift cards for meals. “Yeah, I bounced around the foster care system in Los Angeles before I came up here. It’s a nice present for my 50th birthday, finding a place that feels like home.”

Yvonne had passed through eight foster homes and aged out of the system in a boarding school before the first CASA volunteer was deployed in 1977. So she has had to make a home and community on her own. But in the years since, there has been an explosion of “permanency” studies, policy-making and projects. Concurrent planning, foster-adopt options and family mapping were developed; the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) was passed in 1997, helping double US adoption rates; and CASA programs have helped permanently settle more than two million children. It is a different world from the one Yvonne faced 30+ years ago.

Permanency: It’s in the Relationships

To young people 18 and older, permanency is about building relationships with one or more reliable adults; preserving important connections, including those involving neighbors, community, faith, family, school and friends; and accessing resources that can provide support and guidance long after they emancipate from the child welfare system. (See the *Judges’ Page* issue mentioned in the resources

sidebar, particularly articles by Parnell/Swenson-Smith and DuRocher.)

For minors, permanency is a behavioral health issue. Quick, seamless, permanent placement minimizes trauma and improves brain development, self-esteem and social relationships. Furthermore, long-term costs to the child welfare system and courts are reduced or eliminated.

Each year, children aged 6 or younger make up half of the 300,000 entrants into America’s child welfare systems. Sadly, children’s likelihood of being adopted decreases by 50% the moment they turn 9. The good news is that of the nearly 300,000 children who exit the system each year, 17% are adopted, and 53% are reunited with their birth families after safety can be ensured. (See “Children’s Bureau” in the sidebar.)

But while ASFA has helped improve the pace of permanent placements, achieving them remains a major challenge in a system that harbors more than 780,000 children each year and is accustomed to moving in a slow, straight line, from intake (protective services), to reunification attempts (welfare department), to permanent placement efforts (guardianship-adoption).

Visualize the Endpoint First

To counteract this inertia, CASA of Frederick County, MD, Program Coordinator Jennifer Fuss visualizes the endpoint first. “We get our volunteers excited about the ending, then provide the eyes and ears for the court to get there,” says Fuss, who trains her volunteers in concurrent planning.

Web-Based Resources on Permanency

Child Welfare Information Gateway (childwelfare.gov)

This service of the US Department of Health & Human Services (DHHS) provides a wealth of data, research and listings of federal, state and tribal laws on topics related to abuse, prevention, foster care and permanency. Search for their page on the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA). ASFA tightened permanency hearing requirements, listed “concurrent planning” as a best practice and helped double the rate of US adoptions.

Child Welfare League of America (cwla.org/programs/fostercare)

CWLA helps build public will to ensure safety, permanence and well-being of children, youth and families by advancing public policy and promoting best practices. See especially links to the National Data Analysis System (ndas.cwla.org), which includes state-by-state and national findings.

Children’s Bureau (acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/)

This bureau of DHHS supports services and productive partnerships with states, tribes and communities to provide for children’s safety, permanency and well-being. See especially the latest information from the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS). From the above page, search for “report 14.”

EMQ FamiliesFirst (emqff.org)

Provides direct services in California as well as innovative national trainings on mental health treatment, foster care and social services. Follow links to Training/Education, then to EMQ’s Family Partnership Institute, then to the *Family Search & Engagement Practice Guide*, co-published by Catholic Community Services of

Western Washington and EMQ Children & Family Services. See page 63 for section on connectedness mapping.

The Judges’ Page (CASAforchildren.org/judgespage)

Published by the National CASA Association and the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, this online newsletter is of interest not only to judges but also to child welfare professionals and CASA volunteers. From the archives at the bottom of the page, look for the link to the July 2008 issue, “The Role of the Dependency Court in Achieving Timely Permanency.”

Lutheran Community Services Northwest (lcsnw.org)

A nonprofit human services agency serving communities throughout Washington, Oregon and Idaho. Carries *Concurrent Planning: From Permanency Planning to Permanency Action* by Linda Katz et al., revised 2000. From the home page, search for “concurrent planning.”

National CASA Association (CASAnet.org)

See especially *How Are the Children?*, a report on focus groups of teens living in foster care. From the home page, look for the link “2008 Foster Youth Focus Groups.”

Urban Institute (urban.org)

Provides social and economic issue data, research and program evaluations to foster sound public policy and effective government. See especially their 2004 report *Foster Care Adoption in the United States: A State-by-State Analysis of Barriers and Promising Approaches* by Jennifer Ehrle Macomber, Cynthia Andrews Scarcella, Erica H. Zielewski and Rob Geen. From the home page, search for “state-by-state.”

“It’s not a good idea to just develop one plan, around reunification with the birth family,” she points out. “What if that doesn’t work? You’re left with ‘long-term foster care’ and no permanency.”

Concurrent planning, dual tracking toward reunification and adoption or permanent guardianship with a relative, conflicts with the child welfare system’s linear structure. But without a backup plan, many children end up “drifting” in foster care for years without finding a place to call home, at great costs to themselves and to society. When they emancipate at age 18, they find themselves without permanent connections to families and resources they need for success as adults. (See Macomber et al. in the sidebar.)

“There’s no reason why things have to stay this way,” asserts Linda Katz, who helped invent the concept of concurrent planning in the 1980s and is now program manager of the Dependency CASA Program in King County, WA.

In the 1970s, when she worked at Lutheran Child & Family Services (LCFS) in River Forest, IL, Katz found a small number of social workers doing dual-track planning. She started insisting on placing children with foster families who agreed to the possibility of adopting, if that became an option, and named the program “Foster Adopt.” She helped LCFS secure grant funding, garner publicity and publish statistics showing that the program could help children get into permanent homes faster, cutting their stays in foster care by about two-thirds, preventing emotional turmoil as well as saving thousands of dollars per child per year for board, Medicaid, social work, therapy, court hearings and other expenses.

Katz offers two contemporary Washington cases for comparison:

- In the first, an 11-year-old girl who did not get the benefit of concurrent planning has gone through 12 placements and

[continued on page 10]

now may never be adopted, which leaves her likely to suffer emotional consequences.

- In the second, a “preemie” boy with a backup plan was sent directly to a foster home with the option to adopt. The birth family could not be found, so the boy will now move out of the foster care system, saving himself years of emotional stress by becoming a member of a secure, loving family.

“That [second example] is how it’s supposed to work,” says Katz.

Holistic Approach Trumps Piecemeal: Dual Licensing, Family Mapping

Where it happens, licensing of foster families to simultaneously foster and adopt is a giant step toward achieving permanency. “Formerly, child welfare agencies kept those areas separate to keep ‘cleaner’ relationships in each area they handled,” Katz continues. “But that necessitated moving the child between homes, schools, locales and friends at each new stage and causing new trauma every time.”

Katz goes on to extol the benefits of a holistic approach. “Dual licensing has helped families look at the process as a whole, so they can elect to open their homes long-term rather than as just one more in a series of temporary housing options. It has helped create a more seamless process that is better for the child. It eliminates instability in a system built to stay unstable.”

In California, social workers are legally bound to develop concurrent plans for minors at the jurisdiction-disposition hearing. But many social workers are overscheduled and cannot devote much time to concurrent planning at the beginning of a family’s journey through the dependency system.

“Our program encourages advocates to support social workers by helping them develop the concurrent plan early in a child’s case,” says CASA of Santa Cruz County, CA, Program Manager Kelly Wolf. A key element in developing that child’s “Plan B” is a connectedness map or family map (see example).

The Connectedness Map

Key: **Blue = Blood (biological) connection**

Red = Heart (love) connection

Purple = Spiritual connection

Green = Mind (mental) connection

Place the child in the *center* of the page. Ask her to think of all the people (living or deceased) she is connected to. Include family members, friends, teachers, coaches, pastors, rabbis, etc.—anyone with whom she has/had a connection.

Use one shape to represent males and a different shape to represent females.

Example: Δ = Male O = Female

Next to each shape, write the person’s name and age (if known).

Place individuals who are of similar age to the child on the same level as the child, older people above the child and younger people below to show different generations.

Ask the child how he/she feels connected to each person. **Is this person a blood relative? Does the child love this person? Does this person teach the child, or do they have good, meaningful talks together? Does the child feel a spiritual connection with this person?** The child should then draw the appropriately-colored line between him/herself and the other person. If there are multiple connections, there will be multiple lines.

When children have completed their connectedness maps, they may want to hang them up in their rooms. This can be a consistent reminder of all the people in the world with whom they are connected.

Courtesy of the Santa Cruz County CASA Program, CA

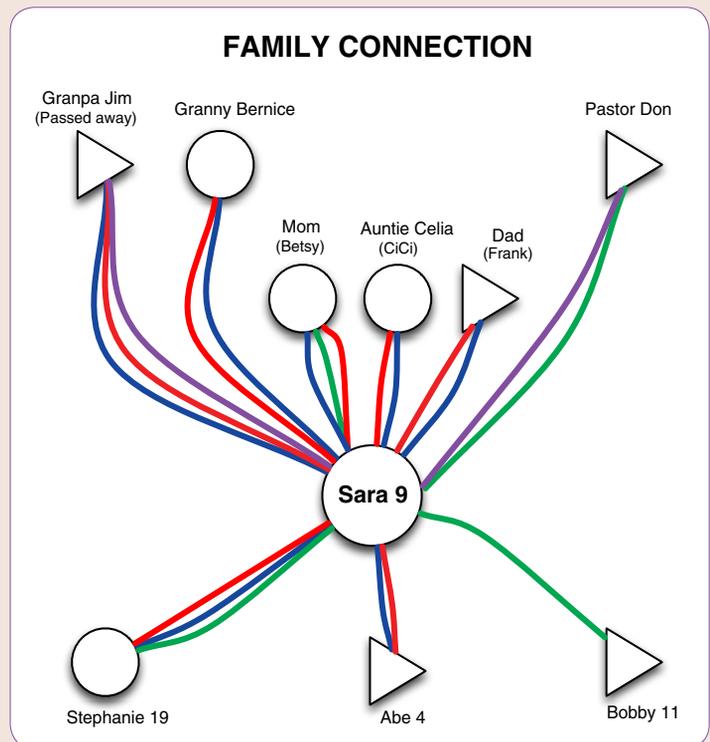


Diagram created by Ray Sherrod

Wolf is among the growing number of practitioners from Hawaii to New York who ask children to generate their own connectedness maps. They do it with the help of supportive adults, informing and adding to the social worker's own list of placement options.

Children's family finding maps incorporate all the people they are, or ever have been, connected to, including family and non-extended relative family members—also known as "family of choice" or "fictive kin." Wolf trained with Kevin Campbell, who now works with EMQ FamiliesFirst (formerly Eastfield Ming Quong) and is known as the originator of family finding. Campbell saw that creating the map reminds foster youth, who frequently feel alone in the world, that they are really surrounded by support.

The maps often include extended relatives, former caregivers, family friends, teachers, neighbors, friends' parents, coaches, godparents and others with whom the child has lost touch. Youth may provide the map to the child's social worker so it can be used as a tool for concurrent planning.

"Frequently, if these people can be found, they are very open to reconnecting with the child," says Wolf. "It's a better option than relying on the general populace to help out."

Once foster candidates are found, alternative placement options present themselves, according to Vicki Wilson, director of Cambria County CASA Beginnings in Johnstown, PA. "Specialized permanent legal custody or guardianship can work for older children who don't want to be adopted and whose parents' rights are not terminated," she says.

A relative can qualify for the federal Kinship Guardianship Assistance Payment (Kin-GAP) program in cases where the child-relative relationship has proven stable, the relative is not willing to adopt, and birth parent reunification efforts have failed. Such cases are closed through dependency court, but the guardian(s) still receives some financial assistance and support.

"Each child, situation and set of permanency goals is unique and needs to be approached differently," says Wilson.



Collaboration: The Antidote to Linear Thinking

Beyond involving children in decision making, several systems are bringing courts and agencies together in successful partnerships.

The Pima County Juvenile Court in Tucson, AZ, was the test bed for Susan Parnell's and Chris Swenson-Smith's 2006 pilot Permanency Collaborative Review Hearing model, designed to help move children who had spent two or more years in care toward permanent solutions. The model brings together case managers, supervisors, the CASA volunteer, the children's attorneys, a behavioral health designee and other involved parties to set agendas and assign actions. It relies on judges to lead processes and conversations; tracks cases on a quarterly basis by child, judge and time in care; sets action goals with courts; and monitors progress toward permanency. In the pilot program, the hearings succeeded in restoring, developing or newly forming connections for 66% of the 26 children they served.

In many cases, it is important to retain cultural connections for children moving toward permanency. Donna Goldsmith and Korey Wahwassuck (see the *Judges' Page* issue referred to earlier) describe groundbreaking agreements in Minnesota that merged Ojibwe Tribal and 9th District state courts into the Leech Lake-Cass County Wellness Court. While it adjudicates post-sentencing

Permanency-Related Tips for CASA/GAL Volunteers

1. Understand federal laws related to permanency.
2. Support the social worker in creating a concurrent plan.
3. Ensure that the child produces a connectedness map as a tool in moving concurrent planning forward.
4. Keep an up-to-date document that tracks kin and significant others, and make sure this information is incorporated into the case plan and prominently placed in the current volume of each case file.
5. Include a review of movement toward permanency in the child and family team process throughout the case, not just at the end.
6. In the CASA report, highlight how long a child has been out of the birth home, and indicate approaching limits. When appropriate, request a ruling from the court about progress toward meeting permanency deadlines.

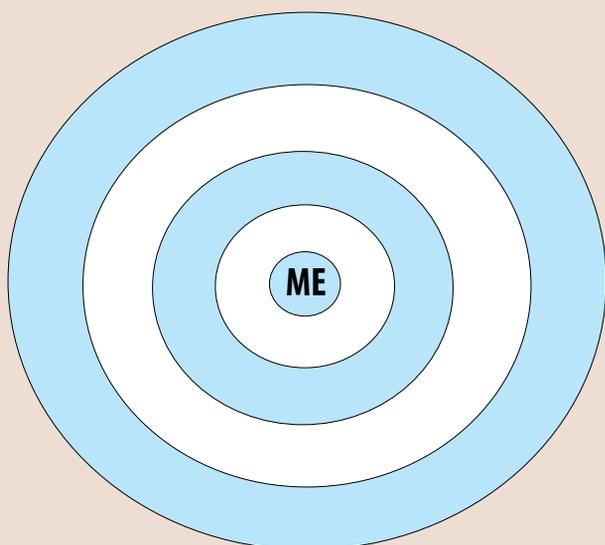
Compiled by the author from interview sources.

[continued on page 12]

Research on Youth Connections Commissioned by National CASA

In 2008, National CASA commissioned a research study centering on a series of focus groups of teens in foster care. Fifty youth in five US cities participated, providing their insights into their experiences in care. These young people shared their thoughts about the effect of the child welfare system on their motivation, the impact of an adult presence in their lives and the prospect of aging out of foster care.

One exercise used in the discussion groups was completing a “Connection Circle.” Youth were asked to place the people in their lives in various circles, depending on how close the relationship is. Teens placed those closest to them within the innermost circle. Results showed that these young people in care feel most strongly connected to their siblings and biological parents. Regarding the latter, one young woman from Anchorage seemed to sum up how



many of the youth felt: “I talk to my mom on the phone. I don’t want to move back in with her or anything, but we do have a relationship.”

Next highest on the list were youths’ best friends and other relatives (especially grandmothers). Foster parents and CASA/GAL volunteers were close behind these groups in the number of mentions. The main criteria youth identified for placing individuals in their inner circle include: “You can relate to them,” “They will listen to you,” “They’re always there for you,” “They believe in me” and “They had a positive impact on my life.” These qualities mirror those that our volunteers are known for.

For the full results, see “2008 Foster Youth Focus Groups” on the home page of CASAnet.org.

hearings for tribal and non-tribal plaintiffs, the authors see potential in it for managing child welfare cases.

“The joint work of the courts is breaking down cultural barriers and resulting in more effective administration of justice in northern Minnesota,” they write. They suggest that this tribal-state model could be modified to handle Native American youth permanency cases, bypassing the need to decide which court has jurisdiction and resulting in decisions that best reflect the child’s best interests.

Retaining cultural influences in a child’s life is also the goal of Hawaii’s EPIC (Effective Planning and Innovative Communication) family welfare programs. Wilma Friesema highlights three cooperative, statewide models that partner Hawaii’s Department of Human Services with family courts and community agencies to help improve Polynesian family and cultural relationships (see *Judges’ Page*).

Ohana (“family”) conferencing blends alternative dispute resolution techniques with sensitivity to the cultural mores of Polynesian families. The Keiki (“child”) Placement Project helps find the extended families of children aged 0–3 as soon as they enter the foster care system. Often, the Keiki and Ohana models are combined, as in the case of “Isaiah,” the newborn child of a drug-addicted, homeless woman. Keiki was able to locate and contact Isaiah’s 42-member extended family, then hold an Ohana conference, which led to the mother’s grandparents agreeing to adopt the child. Finally, E Makua Ana Youth Circles is a youth-driven process that empowers teens aging out of the system to clarify their goals and identify supportive people and resources. They can ask for a Youth Circle whenever they feel alone or run into difficult challenges as they face adulthood.

The Best System Defense Is a Good Advocate’s Offense

Inertia is built into the child welfare system—partly to provide time for families caught up in it to process their options and make appeals, as Jennifer Macomber and colleagues point out in their Urban Institute study (see sidebar). But ASFA and many states require that permanency hearings begin within 12 months of a child’s separation from home.

To help drive permanency proceedings to successful conclusions, advocates must know laws, procedures and personnel. As Linda Katz asserts, “The CASA volunteer should be able to say, ‘This needs to move; this should be heard; this should be decided.’”

It is that kind of strong advocacy that will help move children in foster care most quickly into homes they can call their own. 🏠

Martin Westerman, father of two sons and author of three books, teaches communications and sustainable business practice in Seattle. This is his third feature story for The Connection.

Forgotten Children Events Spring into Action

A recent national Harris Poll of over 2,400 adults found that 83% of all adults say they “know little or nothing” about youth and children in the foster care system. To help turn this situation around, more than 100 CASA and GAL programs across the country produced local *Forgotten Children* events this spring. Each of these events included the compelling displays of life-sized cutouts of children holding messages that we have heard from youth in care. Local print and broadcast coverage has been substantial in each venue.



Forgotten Children event at the California State Capitol in Sacramento

In addition to awareness of what CASA volunteers do, many events have provided an opportunity for government officials to declare their support. In Denver, State Senator Joyce Foster read a resolution in honor of the CASA program on the floor of the state legislature. In Chicago, Mayor Richard M. Daley officially proclaimed May 8, the day of the Chicago event, as *CASA Day*. And in Austin, TX, Governor Rick Perry proclaimed April 14 *Texas CASA Day*, saying, “I encourage all Texans to become more aware of CASA as well as the issues surrounding child abuse and neglect. Only by becoming informed and, ideally, involved in working toward a solution can we finally ensure that all children in Texas are safe.”

Many local programs have also realized generous financial support resulting from awareness generated by their *Forgotten Children* event. For example, the Staunton, VA, CASA program received nearly \$18,000 from individual and corporate donors. Many programs also took advantage of the event to utilize the innovative “Friends Asking Friends” fundraising website offered by National CASA. By making it easy for CASA volunteers to share their stories with friends and family, this website has proven to be a highly effective tool for generating needed individual donations and support.



Rev. Jesse Jackson walks through the Chicago *Forgotten Children* display.

Walmart Foundation Supports New Program for Older Youth

To help address the unique challenges faced by older youth in foster care, National CASA has developed a new program titled *Fostering Futures*. The Walmart Foundation recognized the value of *Fostering Futures* with a \$1.6-million grant to develop and launch the program in 2009. Funding from the Walmart Foundation allows National CASA to support local CASA and GAL program efforts to recruit, train and retain volunteers to work with older youth.

Each year, an estimated 25,000 young people between the ages of 18 and 21 are legally required to emancipate from the foster care system. Aging out of foster care without a life plan or preparation puts these vulnerable youth at great risk. These risks include homelessness, unemployment, substance abuse, criminal involvement and mental health issues.

Youth older than age 13 are less likely to be adopted and more likely to age out of the foster care system with little or no adult support. *Fostering Futures* will engage CASA volunteers as advocates for and advisors to youth ages 13–21, with the goal of helping them develop specific transition plans, identify supportive adult connections and achieve positive outcomes once they transition out of care.

“In all of our giving efforts, we strive to meet the needs of underserved populations,” says Margaret McKenna, president of the Walmart Foundation. “Our support of National CASA’s *Fostering Futures* program reinforces that commitment by expanding the resources necessary to help foster youth become successful adults.”

Congressman Jim McDermott (D-WA), chairman of the Ways and Means Subcommittee on Income Security and Family Support and sponsor of the *Fostering Connections to Success Act*, adds his perspective: “I am pleased that the Walmart Foundation has chosen to generously support *Fostering Futures*.”

[continued on page 14]

This collaboration between National CASA and the Walmart Foundation will provide some real help to youth in foster care who face being pushed out of the system on their 18th birthday.”

Meghan McNamara, once served by CASA of New Hampshire, provides this excerpt from her thank-you letter to the Walmart Foundation:

As a teen living in foster care, my life was a constant struggle. I would not let myself trust anyone, and I was moved through more than a dozen foster placements. So many people bounced in and out of my life—social workers, foster families, therapists—most of them just shadows in the long line of faces that passed, barely noticing me.

Only one face was constant and familiar: my CASA volunteer.

I am writing today to thank the Walmart Foundation for supporting National CASA with a grant to develop and launch Fostering Futures. As a former foster child, I am excited that the foundation recognizes the importance of CASA volunteers for older foster youth.

I took what I learned from my CASA volunteer and got myself on my feet. Today, I work with foster children and their families. I am also involved with improving the foster care system by making changes on the judicial level. I am happily married, I own a home, and I have guardianship of my niece. I would not have made it here without the touch of CASA in my life.

By putting CASA volunteers into the lives of older foster youth, Fostering Futures will give others like me a real chance at life. Thank you again for recognizing the importance of investing in the lives of older foster youth!

Meghan McNamara

Actor and Director Edward James Olmos Speaks Up for Latino CASA Volunteers

Emmy-winning and Academy Award-nominated actor and director Edward James Olmos went on Spanish-language TV and radio on May 13 to recruit support and volunteers for CASA and GAL programs. You may remember Olmos from his portrayal of Jaime Escalante in the movie *Stand and Deliver* or of Admiral Adama in the long-running TV series *Battlestar Galactica*. What you may not know is that Olmos is also a dedicated father of six children, four of whom were adopted. So, as he said numerous times over the air, the CASA cause speaks to him personally.

The Olmos media tour received significant national coverage, including by Univision TV’s national morning show *Despierta America* as well as CNN en Español and Telemundo national TV



news. The tour also included live television and radio interviews in stations across the country.

Sonia Ferrer, executive director of the Miami GAL program, saw Olmos on Univision and commented: “I saw James on Univision yesterday, and he was absolutely fabulous! I loved it when they asked him what it took to be a CASA volunteer and his answer was ‘Corazon y alma.’ In English, that means ‘Heart and soul.’ It was very powerful!”

Partnership Between National CASA and Casey Family Programs Strengthens Children’s Racial and Cultural Identities

The lives of children in foster care are filled with uncertainty: *How long will I live here? Will I ever see my sister again? Why can’t my mother care for me?* For youth in foster care, racial, ethnic and cultural heritage can be one more unknown. Ask a child in care about her background and she may equivocate: “Most of my life, I thought I was primarily Native American. Just recently I learned that I’m mostly white,” 22-year-old Kaylee stated during a presentation at the recent National CASA Annual Conference.

To strengthen the racial, ethnic and cultural identity of children in foster care, develop multicultural competence and provide youth with a foundation to navigate racism and discrimination, the National CASA Association is collaborating with Casey Family Programs to deliver *Knowing Who You Are (KWYA)* to CASA program staff and volunteers of selected programs throughout the country. A comprehensive curriculum developed by Casey, KWYA encourages adult participants to first question their own assumptions and biases and explore their own racial and ethnic identity, as preparation to then work with youth in foster care to strengthen their sense of themselves.

Knowing Who You Are—a three-part curriculum consisting of a video, electronic learning module and two-day in-person learning experience—was originally designed for social workers,

[continued on page 27]

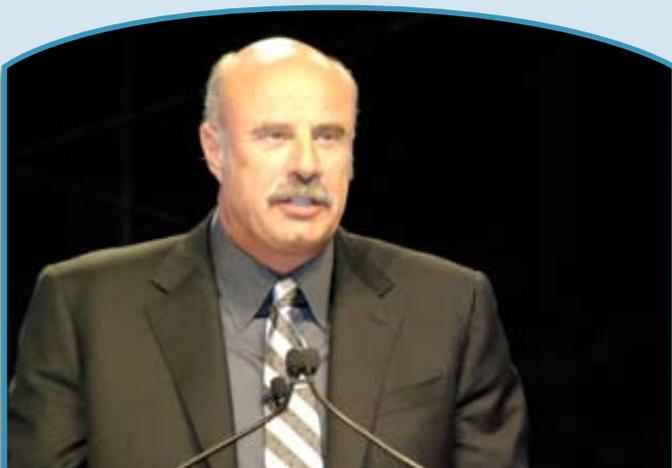
2009 national conference



National CASA's 28th annual conference brought together CASA/GAL volunteers, staff members, judges, child welfare professionals and others for an intense few days of learning, sharing expertise and embracing the conference theme *Taking Advocacy to a Higher Level*.

Nearly 1,500 people representing programs from across the country attended the conference, which took place April 25–28 in Denver. Conference highlights included keynote addresses by Dr. Phil and Robin McGraw, Gloria Burgess and Michael Piraino, National CASA CEO.

See a slideshow from the 2009 National CASA Conference at CASAforchildren.org.



The number one influence on the ultimate outcome for a child is whether or not there's an adult in their life to step up, put an arm around their shoulder and guide them through the maze.

—Dr. Phil McGraw, host of the *Dr. Phil* show and National CASA spokesperson



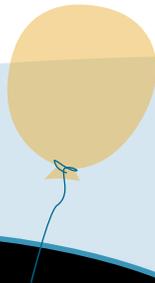
It breaks my heart to think of children who experience a day in court without a CASA volunteer by their side. With a CASA volunteer, it is a very different kind of day. Their hand is held, they're hugged, they're not alone.

—Robin McGraw, regular guest on the *Dr. Phil* show and National CASA spokesperson



There are now almost 69,000 people in the National CASA network. You are part of the largest—and I would say best—volunteer-based child advocacy movement in the world. What makes an organization sustainable? It's not rules or coercion or regulations—an organization is successful when its members are compelled by principles and values to do the right thing, no matter the situation. I think that describes the CASA/GAL network.

—Michael Piraino, National CASA CEO



My CASA volunteer has done everything. He's helped get me into the schools I want to go to. He's the father I never had, and the mother, and the grandparent. He's done everything just fine and I would not change a single moment.

—Joseph Hill, musician and youth in foster care



The power to transform and inspire is what we carry with us all the time, and it's one of the greatest powers on earth. In my world—in your world—success is defined by taking responsibility for yourself and others. It's about leaving the world a little better than you found it.

—Gloria Burgess, PhD, founder and principal of Jazz, Inc.

Outgoing board member **Mimi Feller** is presented with a Native American star quilt at the national conference. She is joined by (left to right) Helen Norris, director of the Pawnee CASA Project (OK); Bev Tuttle, coordinator of the Oglala Lakota CASA Program (Pine Ridge, SD); Jeffrey Not Help Him, Oglala Lakota CASA volunteer; and Arlana Bettelyoun, director of the Oglala Lakota program. Feller was a champion of tribal CASA programs, always advocating for National CASA to provide a high level of financial support and technical assistance. The star quilt, presented by the Oglala Lakota CASA Program on behalf of all tribal CASA programs, is a high honor given only at special occasions.

Feller was recognized for 10 years of service on the National CASA Board of Trustees, including two years as president. As a former executive with Gannett and a longtime member of National CASA's Education and Public Awareness Committee, she was instrumental in obtaining increased federal funding for the CASA/GAL network. Feller also chaired the Public Relations and Marketing Committee and helped secure long-standing promotion of CASA programs by CBS Television.





Awards of Excellence Winners Honored at National Conference



National CASA President Hon. Ernestine Gray (left) with Frankye Hull

Frankye Hull

**2009 G.F. Bettineski
Child Advocate of the Year
Kershaw County Guardian ad Litem
Program, Camden, SC**

Frankye Hull is a diminutive 73-year old who walks with a cane. But school officials, child welfare workers and court officers in Camden, SC, where she is a GAL volunteer, have learned she is a force to be reckoned with. They know Hull will single-mindedly work for children’s best interests no matter what others might want her to do. She has earned tremendous respect around the Kershaw County Courthouse, and it shows in the words people use to describe her: *Powerful. Persuasive. Relentless. Fair.*

While her directness sometimes flusters adults, says Elizabeth May, executive director of the Kershaw County GAL program, “the children literally run to her, knowing she is on their side.”

Hull became a child advocate 10 years ago after a 30-year career as a public school teacher. In 2000, she suffered a devastating brain aneurism. When she recovered, Hull dropped most of her other volunteer activities and devoted herself to her GAL work. “God kept me here for a reason,” she says, “and that reason is the children.” Despite disabling arthritis, she is an energetic advocate who can juggle four or five cases at once and enjoys a bit of creative sleuthing.

“Frankye should be recognized as the standard bearer for the model GAL,” says Kershaw County’s attorney for the guardian on abuse and neglect cases. And she is that model for many of her peers. As one GAL volunteer in the program often says, “I aspire to be Frankye Hull.”

Simone Jones

**2009 Kappa Alpha Theta CASA/GAL
Program Director of the Year
CASA of Adams and Broomfield
Counties, Brighton, CO**

As soon as Simone Jones heard about the CASA movement, she knew she wanted to volunteer. The fact that no program existed near her home did not deter her—she rallied support and collaborated with officials to start one. In the 10 years since the program was born, says Jones, “I’ve nurtured it, watched it grow and survived several bouts of growing pains. It has truly been a labor of love.”

Under her watch, CASA of Adams and Broomfield Counties has grown from 2 staff members and 31 volunteers serving 82 children to 7 staff members and 114 volunteers serving 300 children. Jones has cultivated healthy relationships with court officials, social service agencies and other community organizations. She has also created and implemented innovative collaborations to get children and youth actively involved in their cases. Jones recently launched a program aimed at recruiting volunteer advocates for older youth in care. According to a district court judge, these older youth “finally feel like someone cares about them.”



Jones says she draws energy from the CASA volunteers she works with. “They make me want to come to work every day and work harder,” she says. “Our CASA volunteers remind me that we can change the world, one child at a time.”

[continued on page 18]

The Honorable William Hitchcock
2009 National CASA Association
Judge of the Year
Children's Court of Anchorage Alaska
CASA, Anchorage AK



When he started promoting the CASA model more than two decades ago, Master William Hitchcock, now the presiding judicial officer for children's court in the Anchorage Superior Court, heard a piece of criticism that became, for him, the model's strongest selling point. The critic complained that volunteer advocates do not have any expertise—"all they have is common sense."

Common sense is a quality Hitchcock values highly, and it is one he continuously strives to bring to court cases involving children and families in Alaska—even when it means bucking conventional wisdom.

"If it's innovative and will improve the court system for children and youth, [Hitchcock] is involved—often leading the way," says Marion Hallum, director of Alaska CASA.

Since he started the first CASA program in Alaska in 1987, Hitchcock has been its tireless advocate, supporting expansion efforts throughout the state and helping to

train advocates. He has also been an innovator, working to recruit and train more Alaska Native CASA volunteers and leading efforts to get youth involved in their court cases.

"Master Hitchcock goes beyond his duties of sitting behind the bench," says Amanda Metivier, a former foster youth and president of Facing Foster Care in Alaska. "He is a true champion of children and youth in foster care."

Cathy Pinto
2009 National CASA
Board Member of the Year
Essex County CASA, Inc., Newark, NJ

In 11 years as a board member of the Essex County, NJ, CASA program, Cathy Pinto has jumped into nearly every role: fundraiser, press agent, event planner, financial watchdog, lobbyist, (unpaid) interim executive director and child advocate for six siblings. Under her watch, the program's revenue has increased 130%, and the number of children served has grown 43%.



But those numbers do not begin to tell the story of how fully Pinto's heart is engaged in the CASA program. "Foster care is a band-aid, but CASA is a cure," says Pinto. "The power that a well trained CASA volunteer has is unmatched." She should know—she and her husband have been foster parents for 20 drug-affected newborns, and they adopted two of those babies from care after they had already raised their three biological children.

In addition to building the Essex County program, Pinto was a driving

Thank You to Our Conference Sponsors

National CASA gratefully acknowledges the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) and Newmont Mining for their generous support of the 28th Annual National CASA Conference, which brought together nearly 1,500 individuals to strengthen our ability to improve the lives of America's abused and neglected children.



Thank you for your dedication and service to children.

force to establish a statewide CASA advisory board that addressed important issues affecting CASA programs across the state.

“Cathy Pinto would walk on hot coals for Essex CASA,” says a fellow board member. And he is not joking.

As Pinto explained in written remarks presented in her absence during the award presentation, CASA volunteers—including board members—need to have empathy. “You have to feel the pain of these children in order to be an advocate who will try to make the pain go away,” she says. “You have to delight in their successes in order to facilitate more situations where they can succeed. In short—they have to become *yours*.”

Guardian ad Litem Program—11th Judicial Circuit

2009 National CASA Association Inclusion Award Miami, FL

Miami-Dade County is one of the most ethnically diverse areas in the nation. The 11th Judicial Circuit GAL program has worked deliberately to attract and recruit staff members, board members and volunteers who are not only talented and competent



Director Sonia Ferrer

but who *also* more closely resemble the children the program serves.

The Miami-Dade GAL program leaders understand that inclusion begins at home; in other words, only by assembling a diverse staff could they hope to attract a diverse volunteer base. Between 2006 and 2008, the program recast its staff, increasing African-American representation by 57% and more than doubling the number of male staff members. Employees are enthusiastic about using their ethnic identities to assist in volunteer recruiting. For instance, a Haitian staff member might speak to Haitian parents at a PTA meeting, and a Jewish staff member might speak at a synagogue.

As it changed its own ethnic makeup, the Miami-Dade program created new training opportunities for staff and volunteers dealing with issues of identity. It also established a support group for volunteers in which participants share information about identity issues facing the children they serve.

The program’s efforts are guided by a detailed plan that makes inclusion and cultural competence a top priority for the program and defines diversity in the broadest possible terms: race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and gender. As a result, says Ana Maria Pozo, director of the region’s foster care review program, the 11th Judicial Circuit GAL program “has helped to build a community where all children are safe and welcomed.”

2009 CASA/GAL Network Promising Practices Spotlights CASA-Office of Community Services, Partners in Process CASA Jefferson Program Harvey, LA

Today, CASA Jefferson County and its local child protection agency, the Office of Community Services (OCS), share a robust, open and fruitful collaboration. But that was not always the case. It took a deliberate process to turn a relationship marked by distrust and turf scuffles into a partnership focused on a common goal: finding safety and permanency for children in foster care.



Left to right: Hannah Dunn from the Office of Community Services and Cynthia Chauvin, director of CASA Jefferson

By incorporating opportunities for cross-training, modeling effective communication and adhering to an explicit chain of command, CASA Jefferson County and OCS have created a collaboration that is easily replicable by programs across the country.

“Collaboration is truly a mindset,” says Cynthia Chauvin, director of CASA Jefferson County. “The gift in this process is that our efforts promote quality service to children and families.”

**CASA of Lea County
CASA-Schools Partnership
Hobbs, NM**

Teachers in Hobbs, NM, are tuned into the issues facing their students living in foster care. Children who in the past might have been labeled simply as “disciplinary problems” are now treated with compassion by teachers who understand the brutal consequences of abuse and neglect. The change is the direct result of an innovative partnership between the school system and the local CASA program that recruits school employees as CASA volunteers and opens new channels of communication among educators, courts and the child protection system.

Through the CASA-Schools Partnership, CASA of Lea County has tapped into a rich new vein of compassionate, talented volunteers with special expertise in educational advocacy; it has also increased



Anita Braun, executive director, CASA of Lea County

the visibility of the CASA program within this largely rural community. Teachers are providing creative ideas for improving services for children in foster care, they are educating their

coworkers about child protection issues, and they are helping to create a wider safety net for youth in their community living in care.

Next Year's Conference

Save the date for the 29th annual National CASA Conference: April 16–19, 2010, in Atlanta, GA. Registration information will be available at CASAforchildren.org in late 2009.

If you would like to receive electronic updates about the 2010 conference, and are not already on our email list, please send an email to staff@nationalcasa.org with “2010 Conference” in the subject line. 📧



Denver locals confer at the host city table before a general session. Puppy is a service dog in training to work with children learning to read.

6 Tips for Working Well with Judges

Hon. Susan B. Carbon
Supervisory Judge
Merrimack County Family Division
State of New Hampshire

Years ago, when I was first appointed to the bench, I was approached by our state CASA program's executive director, Marcia Sink. She was seeking my support of having CASA volunteers in the child protection hearings over which I was responsible. She, and the volunteers she trained, went on to teach me the value of having an independent and committed guardian ad litem for each child. They also taught me what good practice in court could, and should, look like.

I genuinely value the CASA volunteers with whom I have worked over these many years and hope this short note will be of help to new advocates around the country. I also hope the tips will help other readers understand what volunteers do. Although these recommendations may seem obvious to some, they form the heart of what a CASA volunteer does both in and out of court.

1. Know the child(ren).

Above all else, meet the children as soon as you can. Get to really know them as best you can. Communicate with them at their level so they will understand who you are and that you are there to help them. It will take time to earn their trust, especially for those whose trust in people and systems has been broken, likely more than once. If you do not know the children for whom you are responsible, it is difficult to know what is truly in their best interests. Only when they can trust and respect you will you truly be able to advocate for them.

2. Know the parent(s).

Working on child abuse and neglect cases necessarily involves working with the child's parents. You need to learn their strengths and challenges as parents as well as get to know them as people. Seek to understand how it is that petitions were filed against them so that in turn you can better advocate for and help the child. Just as you work to earn the child's respect, you should earn the parents' trust and respect as well. Do not be their enemy or be perceived as hostile to them or infringing their rights. Rather, you are there to advocate for their children, whether that supports or leads to reunification or to something else. You and the parents have a common goal of wanting what is best for the children. Ultimately it is the judge who decides. Help make the parents feel confident that you are a competent and caring advocate. When parents are doing well, be generous with your praise. When they are struggling, let them know their children need them to do better.

3. Communicate with everyone involved.

Whether preparing for court or other events on behalf of the children, you must communicate with a host of people: the child protection agency, service providers, attorneys and many

others. Make yourself known to them. Read their reports. Know where you are in agreement and where you differ. Communicate your concerns, positive or negative. In anticipation of court hearings, ensure that everyone has your reports well before so that your perspectives can be carefully considered by everyone, including the court. You have been appointed by the court to take on an immensely important responsibility: fulfill it to the best of your ability.

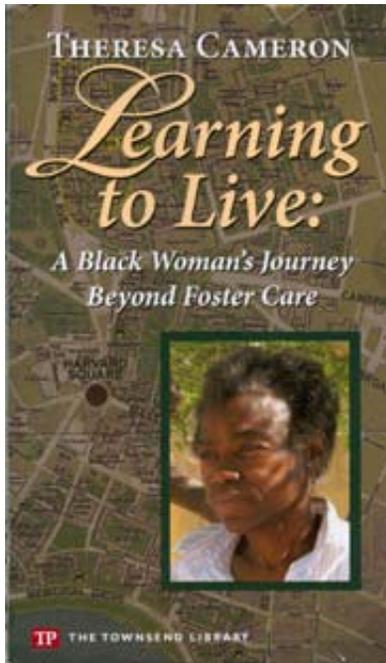
4. Model professionalism.

At every step of the way, take the high road. Be respectful, patient, courteous, open-minded, informed and kind. Hearings can be difficult, particularly when progress is not being made or when many divergent and conflicting views are expressed. It is important to remain calm, listen carefully, assimilate information, sift through what is important to the child and present clear recommendations that are in the child's best interests. Every time you come into contact with anyone involved in a case, let them leave with the impression that you are confident, competent and caring. How you interact with everyone, both in and out of court, teaches others, including the child, the values and behavior you would like to see demonstrated.



Judge Carbon watches Angelina Kanellos sign her adoption papers on her 7th birthday in April 2009.

[continued on page 22]



Learning to Live: A Black Woman's Journey Beyond Foster Care

By Theresa Cameron; Townsend Press: West Berlin, NJ, 2009; 278 pages; Nonfiction townsendpress.com

Theresa Cameron's first book, *Foster Care Odyssey: A Black Girl's Journey*, detailed her early years as a foster child schooled by Catholic Charities. This sequel begins with Cameron leaving foster care with little more than her high school diploma, a shabby suitcase of well worn clothes and a burning desire to prove that she is somebody.

Education proves to be the key to Cameron's success and her life's anchor. Encouraged by a group home counselor, Cameron applies to Boston College, where she is accepted and receives a four-year scholarship. But having being taken care of by the mostly white Catholic Charities system in Buffalo, she is completely unprepared for a virtually all-black student body and the racial climate in Boston at that time. A lifetime of foster care

and a lack of bonding also leave her socially awkward and unable to trust anyone enough to form intimate relationships. Finding new social situations agonizing, she decides to return to Buffalo just half a year after her arrival in Boston.

Cameron then enrolls impulsively as a sociology major at the State University of New York (SUNY) at Buffalo. She soon drifts to Copenhagen, Denmark, as a foreign exchange student. Her expectations of enjoying a constructive year abroad do not turn out. So she returns to SUNY to finish her degree.

After growing up in poverty and witnessing the consequences of the era's budget cuts to social programs, Cameron has the desire to create decent, affordable housing for low-income people. Challenged by a friend, she applies to Harvard University. To her astonishment, she is accepted as a doctoral candidate in design.

Cameron chooses housing for children with AIDS for her thesis. She studies various long-term care facilities; the layout of their buildings; how they provide services for seriously ill children and their parents; how the building codes affect construction; and the problem of NIMBY, which prevents construction of facilities near private homes. With hard work and help from her colleagues and the support of her academic advisor, she successfully defends her thesis and graduates.

Cameron's life is a vivid illustration of the importance of education in allowing alumni of foster care to ultimately succeed. She has taught at several institutions and became the first African-American to be tenured as a professor in the College of Design at Arizona State University. 📖

[Top Tips continued from page 21]

5. Advocate passionately.

Remember always that you speak for the child. The child is the focus and your principal responsibility. Ask questions. Respectfully expect answers. Hold everyone—the agency, parents and yes, the court—accountable. All of us have roles and responsibilities; help all of us to ensure that we fulfill them. Be independent and courageous, even if in doing so you may not be popular. The child for whom you are advocating will be expecting, and deserving, no less.

6. Ensure the child's presence in court.

If you are in a jurisdiction that invites children to court, ensure they attend when appropriate. If your jurisdiction does not yet include children routinely, ask that they be able to attend on a case-by-case basis, and encourage system-wide consideration of this practice. When they are not present in person, bring a new picture to each hearing. This helps the court appreciate the impact of each and every decision, knowing that children are counting on us to ensure their safety and permanency.

On behalf of my colleagues on the bench in New Hampshire and around the country, know that we deeply appreciate all the time and energy you devote to serving this incredibly important role. 📖

You may read another article by Judge Carbon in the March 2009 issue of The Judges' Page, available at CASAforchildren.org/judgespage.

Asking the Right Questions II: Judicial Checklists to Meet the Educational Needs of Children and Youth in Foster Care

This revision of the original technical assistance brief published in 2005 includes checklists of critical questions every judge should ask about a child's education. Each of the three checklists provides juvenile and family court judges with valuable guidance to ensure that necessary information is obtained in every case to meet the educational needs of children and youth in care. Go to ncjfcj.org and search for "Asking the Right Questions II."

Educational Outcomes Guide

The Legal Center for Foster Care and Education has released a new publication, *Solving the Data Puzzle: A How-to Guide on Collecting and Sharing Information to Improve Educational Outcomes for Children in Out-of-Home Care*. The manual provides details on relevant legal and policy considerations as well as examples from organizations around the country engaging in this important work. The tools that come with the manual include checklists to guide education and child welfare agencies in collaboration. Go to abanet.org and search for "Solving the Data Puzzle."

New Survey Finds that State Child Welfare Budgets May Face Perfect Storm

Although child welfare spending has increased for at least a decade, several factors—driven by the current recession—may be converging to threaten states' capacity to serve abused and neglected children. A new Child Trends study, *Federal, State, and Local Spending to Address Child Abuse and Neglect in SFY 2006*, summarizes key findings from a survey of all states and the District of Columbia regarding

their child welfare expenditures in state fiscal year 2006—the latest year for which data are available. Go to childtrends.org and search for the publication title.

List of State Foster Care Contacts

The National Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice and Permanency Planning has compiled a complete list of state foster care contacts (updated 5/09) as part of the 2009 National Foster Care Month campaign. For each state and the District of Columbia, the listing offers the appropriate organization/agency name, telephone number (when available) and website for those seeking to learn more about foster care or how to become a foster parent. Visit hunter.cuny.edu and search for "Foster Care Fact Sheets."

Child Maltreatment 2007 Available Exclusively Online

This annual report from the Children's Bureau presents national and state statistics on child abuse and neglect. The statistics are derived from data collected by child protective services (CPS) agencies through the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System. This year's report shows a decrease in the number of children who were maltreated—794,000 in 2007, down from 904,000 in 2006. "While it is too early to say whether this year's decrease reflects a trend, we are encouraged by these numbers," said Curtis L. Coy, Department of Health and Human Services acting assistant secretary for children and families. The report includes information on:

- The estimated 3.2 million referrals made to CPS agencies in 2007 involving the alleged maltreatment of approximately 5.8 million children
- Fatalities that occurred as a result of maltreatment
- Perpetrators of maltreatment

- Services to prevent maltreatment and to assist victims
- Print copies of *Child Maltreatment* are no longer available. Visit acf.hhs.gov and search for "Child Maltreatment 2007."

Two New Chapin Hall Reports Available

Helping Former Foster Youth Graduate from College, a Chapin Hall study by Amy Dworsky and Alfred Perez, examines campus support programs in California and Washington state aimed at helping former foster youth succeed in college. Researchers interviewed program directors and collected data from students through a web-based survey. The study identified a number of challenges facing campus support programs as well as ways in which these programs are helping foster youth make the transition to college. The study lays the groundwork for an evaluation of program impact on student retention and graduation rates.

Review of State Policies and Programs to Support Young People Transitioning Out of Foster Care, by Amy Dworsky and Judy Havlicek, provides a comprehensive review of state efforts to support youth transitioning out of foster care. As part of the review, Chapin Hall administered a web-based survey of state independent living services coordinators that covered a number of areas including conditions under which foster youth can remain in care after turning 18, independent living and transition services provided, opportunities for youth to reenter care and how state dollars are used to supplement federal funds.

To read either report, go to chapinhall.org/research and search for "Amy Dworsky." You must register at no cost in order to access the documents. 

Omaha CASA Program Utilizes Volunteers as Educational Advocates

Nancy Wilson
Executive Director
CASA for Douglas County
Omaha, NE

Advocating for the best interests of abused and neglected children in and out of the courtroom has led our CASA program to utilize CASA volunteers as educational advocates for children who do not have a parent or another adult in their lives to fill this role. While all CASA volunteers must be aware of and advocate for the educational needs of the children they serve, CASA for Douglas County has created a more formal program.

It started two years ago, when a social worker asked a CASA volunteer if she would take on the educational advocacy responsibility. We researched this concept and sent designated staff and volunteers to a statewide training in March 2008. That training provided the necessary tools to mold CASA volunteers into educational advocates, with the goal to improve academic outcomes for school-age children in care. Research discussed at this training revealed that youth in foster care are at higher risk for homelessness, poverty, public assistance and juvenile or adult court involvement; when these youth have unmet educational needs, the risks are even higher. These children are 2.5 times more likely to repeat a grade than non-maltreated children.

Educational advocacy has been especially important for those children who qualify for special education services but have not been tested—or for those children who qualify for services but are not receiving them on a consistent basis. Our volunteers

are paying close attention to such scenarios for the simple reason that if school services are interrupted or not made available, it will cause unnecessary setbacks in a very important part of a child's life.

Two experienced CASA volunteers who worked in the school system assisted the CASA program in identifying what special services children should be receiving in the school setting and what questions to ask. They also identified three initial steps to take. The first step is to ensure that the social worker has made the school aware that a child is



The author with her board president's son Ian, who is getting his arm painted at an open house

National CASA's Recommended Volunteer Role in Supporting Educational Outcomes

- Ask questions related to the child's education.
- Be the "squeaky wheel" to which the school responds.
- Talk to children about their needs and wishes regarding their education.
- Ask questions of all the adults involved in making decisions about the child's life, including school staff.
- Act as a communication "bridge" among various institutions and individuals who interact and care about the child's welfare.
- Work on behalf of the child to ensure that school needs are being addressed by someone.
- Be the educational advocate or, more often, identify the educational advocate who will help a child find a successful route through the educational system and beyond.
- Develop and recommend strategies to the child welfare system and the court to overcome barriers to an effective educational plan.
- Explore ways to improve overall success; support and recommend changes that may be required for learning.
- Identify the caring adults within a child's school; every child deserves one in the educational setting.
- Ensure that the court has all the information needed about the school situation so that the judge can make appropriate orders and case plans.

in foster care. Unfortunately, in some cases, the schools are not made aware of children's foster care status until a CASA volunteer is assigned. The second step is to obtain school records and any relevant school history. This needs to be done according to federal law or by order of the court. The third step is to identify one person at the school with whom the advocate can establish a communicative working relationship. That person can be a teacher, school counselor, student personnel assistant, etc. As an example of how this works, the school person designated for one of our cases emails the CASA volunteer each Friday with the child's progress and grades.

Another crucial consideration is advocating for children to remain in the same school despite removal from their parental homes and subsequent placement changes. It is imperative to keep consistency in a child's life as studies show that children who change schools can actually be 6–12 months behind other students academically.

Educational advocates can research other school and community programs to assist a child who is not identified as disabled but needs extra help. They can ensure that school records are transferred expeditiously to reduce enrollment delays, that transportation issues

have been addressed and that children who need early intervention services receive them. Finally, educational advocates can ensure that Individual Education Plans are realistic, developed by a team that understands the child and his or her needs and reviewed at least once or twice per year.

These are just a few ways that educational advocates can be successful on behalf of the children they serve. See the sidebar for other steps recommended for volunteers by the National CASA Association. For more information about the Omaha CASA program, contact me at (402) 932-5644 or nwilson@casaoama.info. 



You are there for a child.

As a CASA volunteer, you understand more than anyone what it means for children to have advocates in their lives.

Please consider a gift in your will and help ensure that future generations of children benefit from your legacy. To find out how you can give for the future, please contact us today.

National CASA Association

100 West Harrison | North Tower, Suite 500
Seattle, WA 98119 | 800-628-3233, ext. 267
plannedgiving@nationalcasa.org | casaforchildren.org

Happy Birthday, Emma! CAJA Program, Huntsville, AL

As Emma Houssain was planning her 8th birthday party with her mother, she thought, yes, food and games would be fun. But did she really need a lot of presents? Instead, she and her mother thought it would be better to give her birthday money to an organization in her community that helps children. After some online research, they found the Court Appointed Juvenile Advocate (CAJA) program in Madison County. They visited the CAJA office, heard about other children in her community who do not always have safe and loving homes and took some of the program's brochures to include with the party invitations. After the event, Emma presented CAJA Program Director Shirley Ingram with a check for \$390.



Emma Houssain with certificate presented by Program Director Shirley Ingram

Speak Up for Kids CASA 5K CASA of the South Plains, Inc., Lubbock, TX

The 4th annual Tech Theta *Speak Up for Kids CASA 5K* race was recently held in Lubbock, TX. Over 750 participants joined to raise awareness about child abuse in the South Plains region of Texas and to raise funds for CASA of the South Plains, Inc. A balloon display



demonstrated the number of children currently being served by the CASA program. A total of 450 blue balloons represented the number of children who currently have a CASA volunteer, and 200 red balloons showed the number of children still awaiting one. One CASA volunteer shared her story and encouraged others to take the step and volunteer. Other events that day included the Heart Gallery (photos of children who are currently available for adoption), a *Kids K* race for athletes 12 and under as well as numerous vendors who provided pre-race entertainment for all. The Texas Tech Chapter of Kappa Alpha Theta sponsored the run and recruited many of the participants. The Tech Thetas also created event T-shirts and volunteered the morning of the race. Additionally, the event was sponsored by Texas CASA, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Texas and various local businesses.

An Evening in Paris CASA of Talbot County, Easton, MD

For one romantic evening, the Armory in downtown Easton was transformed into a starry night in Paris for CASA of Talbot County's annual benefit to raise needed



(Left to right): Jill Judd, Decorating Committee chair; Martha Tuthill; Dave Tuthill, Floral Decorations Committee chair; Christina Hoff, board member and event chair (Courtesy of Stephen Bland Photography)

funds to support their work. Guests strolled along the cobblestone streets of Paris, viewed the (16-foot tall) Eiffel Tower, relaxed in French bistros while savoring gourmet cuisine and fine wines, enjoyed street performers and listened to cabaret music. Local heroes helped to underwrite the evening by becoming sponsors of *An Evening in Paris*, and generous volunteers donated close to 1,000 hours as well as materials for the street scenery, fresh flower topiaries, trees and silk flower creations. Executive Director Robin Davenport emphasized that the event sponsors are "all heroes to our community's most vulnerable children. Our sponsors' support helps raise vital funding for

CASA's efforts to pair a Court Appointed Special Advocate with every child under the court's protection due to abuse or neglect."

Texas House OKs State Worker Leave for CASA Volunteering

The Texas State House gave final approval in late April to a bill that gives state employees paid time off to work as CASA volunteers. Under House Bill 1462, state workers may take five hours of paid leave a month to volunteer for CASA, hours which will not be deducted from vacation time, sick leave, earned overtime credit or state compensatory time. According to Joe Gagen, CEO of Texas CASA, last year 44,928 children were in the state's custody. Of those, 45% had a CASA volunteer.

Award

National Child Labor Committee Presents 2009 Lewis Hine Award to Advocate

Evelyn Gibson, CASA volunteer from Orange County, CA, and 2007 G.F. Bettineski Child Advocate of the Year, recently received the National Child Labor Committee's prestigious Lewis Hine Award for Service to Children and Youth. Named for the acclaimed photographer who documented early 20th century exploitation of child labor, the award is bestowed annually to 10 people nationwide for their efforts

on behalf of the health, education and welfare of children and youth, particularly those at risk. Helping children is something Gibson knew she would do ever since she was a child herself growing up in a family where volunteering was part of life. She says, "Even at the age of 90, my mother was knitting mittens

for orphans in Alaska. It was never a matter of would I volunteer, it was how would I volunteer." She adds, "An abused child, a child from my own city, an African child, a South American child—children are our future leaders. We must not neglect any child anywhere." 🗨️



Evelyn Gibson (right) in New York City with Tracey Brown James, 2009 chair, Lewis Hine Awards

[Association News continued from page 14]

but Casey quickly realized the potential for training other individuals who have a strong role in the lives of foster children. Partnering with National CASA and local CASA programs was a way for Casey to expand the reach of the new curriculum.

"Casey has a long-established history of working with National CASA and CASA programs. We share common ground and a common goal of improving outcomes for children in foster care," says Elena Lamont, manager for community and constituent engagement with Casey Family Programs. "Because CASA volunteers are often the most constant presence in a young person's life, they are in a position to help youth explore and develop ties to their racial, ethnic and cultural identities."

In partnership with Casey, National CASA has facilitated approximately 15 workshops over the past two years. To achieve the greatest results with limited resources, National CASA is focusing KWYA trainings on programs that have already begun to incorporate cultural competence and diversity work into their operations. To expand the reach of the curriculum, National CASA and Casey are certifying selected CASA program staff as KWYA facilitators who can then train their peers and volunteers.

Follow-up surveys of more than 100 KWYA workshop participants have indicated that the trainings are having a positive effect on both the individuals and their organizations. When asked whether they have applied lessons learned during the training, 60% of participants at a Miami training and 70% from St. Louis County CASA indicated that they put their new skills to work on at least a monthly basis.

"*Knowing Who You Are* helped me to think about each child individually. For me it was not only about the race of the child but also about the culture and traditions the child may have grown up with," says Sarah Paton, emancipation coordinator with Orange County CASA. "Now, when talking to advocates, I encourage them to find out what traditions the child had in their family and help to recreate those. I have had advocates work with foster parents to understand and incorporate some traditions of the children into their lives."

In 2009, National CASA is building on the successes of the first two years of the KWYA partnership, with plans to train at least 30 state CASA organization directors and certify 10 additional facilitators. CASA program staff and volunteers who are interested in gaining some exposure to KWYA are encouraged to view the 24-minute video and go through the e-learning curriculum. Both can be found by going to Casey Family Program's website, casey.org, and searching for "Knowing Who You Are." 🗨️

Cochabamba

BOLIVIA



Cheryl Hitson, a volunteer with the Maricopa County CASA Program in Phoenix, AZ, since 2001, poses at an open-air market in Cochabamba, Bolivia. She was visiting her son and daughter-in-law, who work with Food for the Hungry. Hitson visited many orphanages while in the area.

"There are joys and heartaches to being a CASA volunteer, as most any of us can attest to. But in the end, we are here to serve children. That's what keeps us going!"

—Cheryl Hitson

Where do you take *The Connection*? Send us a photo of you or someone you know reading *The Connection* in a unique or interesting location. Since the *Connection* staff is especially interested in comments from readers, submissions including feedback about the publication are most welcome. Whether you are on an airplane or in a courthouse waiting room, help spread the word about this amazing way to advocate for children by telling others about the CASA/GAL cause. Pass along your copy of *The Connection*.

Send photos (min. 4" x 6") to:
The Connection
National CASA Association
100 W. Harrison
North Tower, Suite 500
Seattle, WA 98119
or email high resolution photos (300 dpi scanned at 4" x 6" size) to theconnection@nationalcasa.org. Include your name, address, phone number, email address and photo location.



CASA Volunteers Help Ensure Permanency

Judge Glenda A. Hatchett
National CASA Spokesperson

I am 4 years old and at nursery school. I love my school and my teacher. It's late afternoon, and my mother has called the school office from a pay phone to say that she's been delayed. There was a car accident ahead of her. Fortunately she wasn't involved, but she was held up. I'm here with my teacher because all the other kids have been picked up, and all the other teachers have gone home. There are people outside the school burning leaves on the curb. I stand watching for my mother and smelling the leaves burn. For this short moment, even though I love my teacher and she assures me that my mother is coming, I am devastated by uncertainty.

This was a brief and unique occurrence in my young life, but it is etched in my memory forever. I cannot imagine my life being full of such uncertainty. But this must be what it feels like for children in foster care who do not know what is coming next.

As you have seen in this issue, permanency means many different things depending on a child's circumstances. But for me, permanency means for children to be in loving, caring homes where they are treated with dignity, nurtured and encouraged to be all that they can be.

When I was a juvenile court judge in Atlanta, I could not have been nearly as effective in helping children achieve permanency without the support of the local CASA program. The volunteers were instrumental in seeing to it that children did not languish in foster care but rather were guided toward permanent placement as quickly and safely possible.

One of my favorite stories from those days involves a retired gentleman in his late 60s who volunteered when we first started the CASA program in the court. He took on a case and insisted on serving all three siblings. The children had been in the care of the grandmother because the mother had mental health issues. This worked fine for a while, until the grandmother became overwhelmed by the responsibility. She actually ended up losing her home, at which point she left to seek help from out-of-town relatives. As I understand

it, she did not return as quickly as people thought she would, and the children ended up back in the foster care system.

Fortunately, the oldest of the three children knew that there was an aunt who lived in south Georgia. But she only knew the aunt's first name. The CASA volunteer—we'll call him Ed—got up before dawn and drove nearly three hours to south Georgia.

Ed was not dissuaded by the fact that he only had a first name for the aunt. Let's say it was Betty. Ed went to restaurants, he went to barber shops, he went to beauty parlors in this small town and he asked, "Do you know a Betty? Do you know someone who might have relatives in Atlanta?" For three days he did this. Three nights he drove home without success, and then he got up and started again. And miraculously, on the fourth day, he found the aunt. He met someone who knew someone who knew the aunt. She then came to Atlanta and petitioned the court to take all three of the children home with her, and that is how it ended up.

I am absolutely convinced that those children might have lingered in care indefinitely but for the fact that there was this persistent, committed CASA volunteer. On the first or second day, Ed could easily have thrown up his hands. But for four mornings he got up at dawn and kept on trying. That was a huge commitment, but he was not deterred. I doubt any CASA program would ask a volunteer to spend four days in a car to find a child's relative. But in ways large and small, it is the volunteer's commitment that makes the difference.

Without the 1,018 CASA program offices around the country, what would happen? We would still have committed foster parents and committed social workers. The juvenile courts would carry out their work. But without the added value, the added resources, the added tenacity of this wonderful cadre of men and women who volunteer for CASA programs, there are lives that would *not* be changed. There are children who would linger in uncertainty. But the good news is that we *do* have CASA volunteers. And a fine example is Ed, who was the bridge to permanency for three young siblings. 

The Honorable Glenda A. Hatchett is a nationally recognized authority on juvenile issues known for her award-winning television series Judge Hatchett and her book Say What You Mean, Mean What You Say! See her website for more information: glendahatchett.com.

National Court Appointed
Special Advocate Association
100 West Harrison Street
North Tower, Suite 500
Seattle, WA 98119-4123

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Lancaster, PA
Permit No. 308

Tell Us What *You Think!* Help Determine the Future of *The Connection*.

Is *The Connection* providing the timely information you need about volunteer advocacy and other important child welfare issues? National CASA wants *your* input to guide us in planning the future of our quarterly magazine.

Please take 10 minutes to complete an online survey that will help us better understand your needs as a reader. Participants may enter a drawing with three chances to win a \$50 gift certificate to ShopCASA.

To complete the survey, go to **CASAforchildren.org/survey.asp** before September 30, 2009.

If you would prefer to fill out a paper survey, please call (800) 628-3233, ext. 207 and one will be mailed to you.

